DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 257 165 CS 504 944

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TITLE Relational Listening: Theoretical and Practical Considerations.
PUB DATE Mar 84
NOTE 30p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Listening Association (Scottsdale, AZ, March 7-10, 1984).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Auditory Training; Aural Learning; Cognitive Processes; Elementary Education; *Interpersonal Communication; *Interpersonal Relationship; Language Processing; *Learning Theories; *Listening Comprehension; *Listening Skills; Speech Communication; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS Carkhuff (Robert R); *Empathic Listening; *Therapeutic Listening

ABSTRACT

Attempting to present empathy as a vital ingredient of effective interpersonal listening, this paper first provides a brief historical tracing of the major trends in listening theory and research. This review then serves as a backdrop for a partial justification of an empathic listening emphasis that includes a clarification of some misconceptions regarding empathic listening while indicating potential dangers in a pure skills orientation to listening education. Next, the paper provides a delineation of some of Robert Carkhuff's theories regarding therapeutic listening and their general applicability to listening education and training. Carkhuff's seven dimensions for effective interpersonal facilitation and the five levels of each are individually examined. Finally, the paper offers suggestions on one approach using the Carkhuff model to teach listening skills through a methodology that maintains the integrity of the transactional perspective while avoiding the problems often associated with technique and the skills/process dichotomy. (Author/HOD)

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RELATIONAL LISTENING:

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper has several purposes. First, the paper provides a brief historical tracing of the major trends in listening theory/research. This review then serves as a backdrop for a partial justification and support of empathic listening emphasis. This includes a clarification of some misconceptions regarding empathic listening while indicating potential dangers in a pure skills orientation to listening education. Next, a delineation of some of Robert Carkhuff's theories regarding therapeutic listening and their general applicability to listening education/training is provided. Carkhuff's seven dimensions for effective interpersonal facilitation and the five levels of each are individually examined. Finally, suggestions are provided on one approach to using the Carkhuff model to teach listening skills through a methodology which will maintain the integrity of the transactional perspective while avoiding the problems often associated with technique and the skills/process dichotomy.

RELATIONAL LISTENING: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Historical Background

Interest in the art of listening can be traced to ancient thinkers and writers. Plutarch, for example, presented a fairly comprehensive examination of listening skills in public speaking situation nearly 2,000 years ago.[1] More recent pioneers include Tucker[2], Rankin[3], Brown[4], Bird[5], Nichols[6], Stevens[7], Barbara[8], among others.[9] For over two decades following Paul Rankin's initial studies, through the 1930's and 1940's, the emphasis in the listening research and literature was on attention, comprehension and retention.

The 1950's brought about a change in the emphasis placed on the teaching of listening. A large number of academicians and researchers began to engage in research and writing on the subject of listening. References in journals and textbooks on listening techniques increased. Through the 1950's the listening literature continued to present an understanding of the listening process as reception of aural data, cognitive processing, and recall of that data. Input/output congruence was used to measure listening effectiveness. Little if any emphasis was placed on the interpersonal experience which was the environment for that input/output. Instead, the focus was placed on information, recall, facts and explicit content of messages.[10] As Arnett and Nakagawa state, "the predominant theoretical/research focus in speech communication literature has been the examination of 'comprehensive' listening (listening for understanding of central ideas, principles, themes) and 'critical' listening (listening to

persuasive messages), both of which are applied primarily in public speaking and mass media contexts."[11]

A change became evident in the listening literature beginning in the 1950's and gained impetus in the 1960's. The concept of "speech" (including speaking and listening skills) was gradually supplanted by the concept of the "communication process." The field of psychology also began to address the subject of listening. Theories of counseling and psychotherapy provided the framework for the concept of active listening using empathy. An emerging approach was evolving which viewed listening from an active and interactive perspective. The idea of listening being an active and vital component of interpersonal communication was still in its infancy, but it was rapidly gaining momentum.

In 1955, Carl Rogers coined the term "active listening" to describe the facilitative function of listening with empathy. Extensive research and test construction in the area of humanistic psychology emerged with stressed the salience of empathy. Although the construct of empathy dates back as far as Plato and Aristotle,[12] it was not actively recognized in speech communication theory until the 1960's.[13] Active listening, as opposed to comprehensive listening, involves not only the ability to hear what is said, understand meaning and recall facts, but also includes listening beyond the words to the affective or feeling component of the proffered message to gain an empathic understanding of our communication partner. Empathy involves both the cognitive and affective abilities of the listener.

Throughout the 1960's and 1970's the subject of empathy has stimulated a large quantity of research in a variety of disciplines.[14] Carl Rogers'

nondirective approach to psychotherapy posits the three fundamental characteristics of the helping relationship are congruence or genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding--all of which necessarily must be communicated to the other before healthy personality change and growth can be facilitated.[15] Perception of the "internal frame of reference" of the other person with accuracy as if you were that person--this is the heart of Rogerian empathy.[16] Arnett and Nakagawa point out that subjective experience is a fundamental component of Rogers' empathic understanding and the empathic literature in speech communication:

> In sum, empathic listening literature in speech communication largely presupposes a fundamental dualism between two independently existing subjects, correlative to the communicative functions of speaking and listening. Based upon the necessity to reconcile the presumed separation between self and other, the empathic listener's task is to infer the psychological intentions or internal states of the speaker. Accordingly, subjective experience becomes the final arbiter of meaning ("Meaning is in people, not words.")[17]

The emphasis on empathic listening in the 1970's and 1980's is not without its detractors. Questions have been raised about this popular stress upon empathy as a central focus in effective listening. Empathy involves a kind of separation or putting aside of self in order to focus on our partner's self. Arnett and Nakagawa rightly warn that this reification of self has led to viewing the self as "an empirical object that one attempts to construct, rather than a hypothetical notion."[18] Combined with a trend toward seeing meaning as within a person (rather than created through a transaction), the listening process has often been viewed as a series of techniques.

Therefore, one of the current directions taken in the teaching of listening is the "skills" orientation. For example, the work on empathy of humanistic

psychologists such as Rogers, Truax and Carkhuff has often been distorted and reduced to technique.[19] The interpersonal and transactional perspective has often been supplanted by ignoring the communication framework within which the listening skills/processes function. This can lead to a focus on the separate individuals engaged in the communicative act instead of the "between".

A number of specific types of listening skills have evolved through the skills orientation. Many communication texts, however, use different labels to signify the varieties of listening behaviors and there is consistency, but not agreement, in their listings of the component skills. It appears that empathy is an important component of much of the listening skills emphasis and this is still a predominant approach in listening education, as well as theory.

Perhaps as a backlash against the skills focus, there is now an emerging call among some theoreticians for more of a dialogic or transactional perspective for listening. Farra sees "relational listening" as the forth stage in the evolution of listening theory. He cites the four stages or turning points as follows:

(1.) Plutarch's "Principles of Listening to Lectures"
(2.) Ralph Nichols' "Ten Bad Listening Habits"
(3.) Charles Kelly's "Empathic Listening"
(4.) "Relational Listening" [20]

No matter what the context (interpersonal, group, or public speaking), Farra views the relationship as central to effective listening. While acknowledging the contributions of empathic listening and the resultant skills orientation, theorists such as Arnett and Nakagawa advocate a similar perspective. They declare, "The self, like the earth, can no longer be viewed as the center, but the person must be studied as situated in relationship with the ecological system or relational

system between persons. . . . It is the literature of hermeneutics and a phenomenological dialogue that we recommend."[21] John Stewart concurs and advocates "interpretive listening" as an alternative. He rejects the focus on empathy as a universal approach to listening.[22]

Martin Buber is one often quoted pioneer of dialogic communication. He refers to experiencing the side of the other person. To him, this experiencing means feeling an event from the other's side, as well as from one's own side. This actually goes well beyond what is normally considered "empathy." Friedman indicates this when he explains Buber's position on experiencing the other's side:

> It is an inclusiveness which realizes the other person in the actuality of his being, but it is not to be identified with "empathy," which means transposing oneself into the dynamic structure of an object, hence "the exclusion of one's own concreteness, the extinguishing of the actual situation of life, the absorption in pure aestheticism of the reality in which one participates."[23]

In many respects this stand is much more realistic than the one often taken by communication scholars. Buber coins a new term to describe his way of looking at such experiencing of another:

> What Buber intends to stress is that the meeting takes place against the background of the distinction between the two human beings and therefore he points to the danger inherent in empathy as an exclusion of one man for the sake of his partner. Stressing this danger of exclusion, like similar terms introduced by Buber, intends to stress the immediate relation between the two human beings. . . . Because of the stress laid on the immediacy of the awareness, Buber, like intuitionists, speaks of knowing with one's whole being. . . .[24]

Thus, several theorists have suggested that the pure skills approach to listening education and research must be transcended. Their viewpoint

urges us to move from the empathic inner premise of "getting in touch with selves" to a situational sensitivity of the on-going meaning created "between" selves. There need not be anything insincere or manipulative about the knowledge and practice of specific skills. Listening educators and theorists have often neglected to place the skills into the larger communication complex of the relationship.

As stated earlier, Robert Carkhuff's contribution to the understanding of interpersonal communication and listening has unfortunately often been misinterpreted and reduced to technique. The remainder of this paper will provide a brief overview of Carkhuff's approach to interpersonal facilitation and describe how the author has utilized this approach in listening classes by moving beyond a purely technique-oriented framework.

An Overview of the Carkhuff Approach

Although Robert Carkhuff has written and co-written numerous works, the essence of much of his approach lies in his two volumes entitled Helping and Human Relations. These books are still viewed as major contributions to psychotherapy and counseling theory. He is proportedly the most-cited counseling psychologist of our time and the author of three of the most-cited works in the social sciences. Carkhuff's perspective is broad to accomodate all types of interpersonal relationships, not just helping relationships. As C. H. Patterson states, Carkhuff presents a comprehensive model:

> The model of the helping process which is presented is true to life. It is not an artificial model apart from other human relationships; it brings the helping relationship clearly into line with all good human relationships. The epitome of the relationship is the concept designated by the Greek word, agape. . . . The extension of this aspect of a good, close human relationship, recognized

> in the concept of good family relationships, to helping relationships in general is again a contribution in bringing together all interpersonal relationships in a comprehensive model.[25]

Carkhuff's model includes three critical helping stages: (1) exploration, (2) understanding, and (3) action. Seven interpersonal dimensions are used by the helper/listener to aid the helpee in progressing through these three stages. For purposes of this study, we will concentrate on these dimensions for effective interpersonal functioning as keys to interpersonal listening. Each of the seven "scales" or dimensions is divided into five levels. Carkhuff explains that a level three "constitutes the minimal level of facilitative interpersonal functioning."[26] That is, a listener must be functioning at or above this level in order to facilitate his/her partner's self-exploration and self-understanding. It is a minimum skill level for "communication of understanding" to one's partner.

There are several assumptions which accompany Carkhuff's seven dimensions:[27] The most important of these assumptions is that the helper or listener has the ability to function at high levels on each dimension and is flexible in the use of them. This emphasizes the ecological nature of listening and the need to adapt to each unique transaction. Another related assumption is that the dimensions do <u>not</u> follow a particular sequence. There isn't a special mechanical and linear series of steps which always leads to communication of understanding. However, Carkhuff does suggest the listener implement the dimensions in stages gradually rather than jumping into action steps before true understanding is achieved. Common sense and interpersonal communication theory would substantiate the wisdom of such advice.

The dimensions must be employed by a sensitive listener engaged in a process-oriented transaction. Carkhuff takes a transactional perspective on interpersonal listening.

As was reviewed in the introductory section of this paper, listening skills traditionally concentrated predominately on comprehension of the content. Carkhuff goes beyond this by providing specific guidance for the listener's feedback. This feedback emphasis includes the seven specific listener response skills. These behavioral dimensions or skills have been studied and practiced by hundreds of thousands of persons. For example, it has been estimated that over 200,000 students alone have used Carkhuff's The Art of Helping to master helping skills.

Carkhuff's Seven Dimensions

(1.) Empathic Understanding

Carkhuff begins where much of current listening theory ends--with empathy. Like much of current listening thought and research, empathy is viewed by Carkhuff as perhaps the most vital of all helping dimensions and he cites numerous studies to support this claim.[28] He sees the other six dimensions as critically linked to empathic understanding. Empathic understanding is not a "setting aside of self" to concentrate on the "self" of our partner. As Martin Buber warned, there is danger inherent in empathy if it means the "exclusion of one man for the sake of his partner."[29] Carkhuff states: "Our definition of empathy, then, is a functional one in which the activities of the helper and helpee cannot be separated."[30] This is reminiscent of Rogers' empathic attitude--which, like Carkhuff's, has often been reified into technique alone. Thus, empathic

understanding is much more than reflecting feelings--it is being with your partner in the transaction. "It is the distortion of Rogers' orientation into technique alone that invites 'professional empathic practitioners' to view their knowledge as a science, rather than as artful sensitivity rooted in study."[31] Carkhuff's first dimension acknowledges the need for a wholistic approach to empathy.

Carkhuff indicates that accuracy of empathy is not enough for effective communication; it must be appropriately communicated to our partner. This understanding may be indirectly communicated by employing other dimensions such as concreteness and confrontation, for example. The specific type of empathy being utilized, then, will vary depending at which of the five levels the listener is functioning. Contextual sensitivity is thus a crucial element of empathic understanding and is well established by listening theory/research as well.

At level one of empathic understanding the listener does not indicate any sensitivity to the other's feelings. Even the most obvious surface feelings expressed by the partner are left unacknowledged because of a lack of awareness of them. There is little indication the listener is listening or understanding. At level two the listener does respond to obvious, surface-level feelings of the partner, but these responses "drain off" the true depth of the emotion or distort the meaning. Level three of empathy involves the comprehension and acknowledgement of surface feelings which are expressed by the partner. Our acknowledgement of feeling and content is interchangeable with their feeling and content. Much of traditional listening theory would stop at this level. In this

model, this is the minimum level for sensitive listening and empathic understanding. Levels four and five move toward deeper understanding of feeling that even goes beyond the overt expressions of our partner. We are together or with our partner at these moments. This dimension was derived from "A Scale for the Measurement of Accurate Empathy" and has been consistently validated in extensive couseling and psychotherapy research, as has each of the other dimensions.[32]

(2.) Respect

The communication of respect is recognized by Carkhuff as involving verbal and nonverbal aspects. This dimension is similar to Rogers' concept of "unconditional positive regard." (Although Carkhuff does say that the phrase is a misnomer since no one is completely unconditional in their reactions to another.) Respect deals with the recognition of individuality in our communication partner. The listener "communicates a positive respect and concern for the second person's feelings, experiences, and potentials."[33] There is a confirmation of our partner's human worth which goes beyond dislike of specific actions. This means respect can include opposing attitudes and opinions, since the mutual trust and confirmation of "the other" places emphasis upon the difference between human worth and particular transitory behaviors. Mutual trust is promoted.

This respect is what Rob Anderson calls "listening as other-affirmation." He notes the current emphasis on listening technique alone and responds as follows: "But given this preponderance of attention devoted to the mechanical skills of listening, I've grown more interested in the question of whether you choose

to become a listener, and the effects of that choice on an interpersonal relationship."[34]

Carkhuff's level one on the respect dimension would involve the listener communicating verbally and/or nonverbally that his/her partner's feelings and experiences are either not worthy of consideration or that this partner is not able to act constructively. Carkhuff points out that the "listener" may become the central or sole focus of the transaction at this level. In level two very little respect for the partner's feelings, experiences, and potential is expressed. A lack of personal concern is conveyed. Carkhuff notes that the listener may respond mechanically or passively. This should give us pause for thought about the dangers of the pure skills orientation. Even many professional helpers fall into behavioral patterns that are stilted and professionally mechanical. At level three the listener shows concern for the partner's ability to express self (feelings, thoughts, beliefs, etc.) and to constructively deal with his/her life situation. The listener communicates concern for who the partner is and what he/she does. Level four involves the communication of deep caring, while level five goes even deeper into the value of the partner.[35]

(3.) Genuineness

Genuineness refers to a person being "real" in an encounter, avoiding defensive phoniness and not hiding behind what could be called a professional facade. There is congruence between one's feelings and one's words, just as Rogers describes genuineness. Rogers explains:

> In relation to therapy it means that the therapist is what he is, during his encounter with his client. He is without front or facade, openly being the feelings and attitudes which at the moment are

> flowing in him. It involves the element of self-awareness, meaning that the feelings the therapist is experiencing are available to him, available to his awareness, and also that he is able to live these feelings, to be them in the relationship, and able to communicate them if appropriate. It means that he comes into a direct personal encounter with his client, meeting him on a person-to-person basis. It means that he is <u>being</u> himself, not denying himself.[36]

This dimension will generate the same characteristic in our partner, thus developing a cyclical movement that enhances growth of the relationship and further understanding of content. Frank Dance makes this very point when he comments that congruence or genuineness in human speech will in turn beget these qualities.[37]

Level one on this dimension involves defensiveness on the listener's part. There may be a lack of congruence between the listener's feelings and his/her overt behavior. In cases where there is congruence, the responses are negative toward the partner and are used in a destructive manner in the transaction. In level two, there is some incongruence between the verbal and metacommunication. A "professional" rehearsed quality may be present. The listener appears to be reacting according to a prescribed role. When there are genuine negative responses, the person has difficulty utilizing these reactions in a constructive manner. Level three is a somewhat neutral position where the listener provides appropriate feedback which is congruent, but without high involvement. The listener's communication is congruent at level four and it is obvious he/she means what they say in their feedback. Both negative and positive feelings can be openly and constructively expressed in a manner which aids in furthering the depth of the transaction. Level five involves a deep, open, nonexploitative transaction. The listener is spontaneous and open to the "here and now" experiencing of his/her partner, both positive and hurtful.[38]

(4.) Self-Disclosure

The first three of Carkhuff's dimensions are the same as the three conditions positied by Rogers as necessary and sufficient for effective communication in the client-patient relationship. Carkhuff goes beyond this by providing four additional response skills which can facilitate the effectiveness of the transaction.

Self-disclosure on the part of the listener entails the sharing of feelings, ideas, attitudes, and core beliefs. It is a spontaneous honesty. Healthy relationships are based on self-disclosure. As with the other dimensions, there is a reciprocal aspect to self-disclosure. Gradual sharing at deeper levels tends to beget more on our partner's part. A gradually accelerating progressive spiral is often created much like the "dyadic effect" discussed by Sidney Jourard.[39] Instead of the listener acting toward the partner as if he or she were an object, the listener is involved in the transaction. To use Buber's terms, it is <u>being</u> in the interaction verses acting or <u>seeming</u> in an interaction.

In Carkhuff's level one of self-disclosure little or nothing is directly disclosed about self, feelings, or personality. The listener attempts to "remain ambiguous and an unknown quantity. . . . or if he is self-disclosing, he does so solely out of his own needs and is oblivious to the needs of the second person."[40] Thus, if there is self-disclosure at all in this level it is used in a self-centered manner that detracts from the overall transaction. For example, this could lead to extended self-focused tangents. The first levels are similar to what I call the "monologic stage of self-expression and other-expression."[41]

The second level possesses vague and superficial listener responses regarding self. Information of a self-disclosing nature is not volunteered. In level three the listener generally volunteers personal reactions toward his/her partner and/or toward their interaction. However, these personal reactions and information are often vague and tend to reveal little of the uniqueness of the listener. In the fourth level there is a "free and spontaneous" volunteering of information about the listener's ideas, feelings, attitudes, and experiences. These are related to the partner's concerns so tangents are minimized. This does not involve high verbalization leading to the exclusion of the partner. Lastly, level five involves a high amount of trust. The listener self discloses personal information which is associated with the partner's needs and which could perhaps be very embarrassing if the trust were violated by the partner. Even negative reactions are shared in a constructive manner which leads to further exploration for the dyad.[42]

(5.) Concreteness

This dimension involves "specificity of expression." That is, the listener attempts to focus the partner's verbalizations by moving toward low-level abstraction whenever possible. Generalizations and ambiguious statements are narrowed into particulars in order to increase comprehension. This dimension is especially recommended by Carkhuff for initial portions of a transaction to gain understanding and in the later portions when specific action is encouraged. The purpose of this mid-phase respite is to "break the binds of rigid cosmologies, restricted thinking, and blunted emotionality."[43] For general listening skills, this dimension could be useful at any time during the transaction.

Verbal engagement will often be necessary on the listener's part to solicit particulars and clarify vague statements where the precise meaning is unclear to the listener. This is in keeping with the transactional communication perspective of creating and clarifying meaning through mutual involvement. The listener can also employ concreteness in his/her own comments as an aid in this process. Again, listening is an active and reciprocal endeavor. Understanding is maximized when specific feelings, experiences, ideas, problems, etc. are shared in the dyad. This allows for exploration of specific alternatives if warranted by the situation.

Level one of concreteness involves no attempt by the listener to guide the conversation into "personally relevant specific situations and feelings." Vague, ambiguous generalizations are not explored. The language remains at high levels of abstraction and may be highly intellectualized. At level two the listener doesn't deal in specific terms with most of the partner's feelings and experiences, although some particulars may be mentioned by the partner. Even when these particulars are discussed, they are dealt with at an abstract or intellectualized level. Level three entails the discussion of "personally relevant material" in specific terms, although some areas will still not be dealt with concretely or will not be fully developed. During level four the listener aids in moving the transaction toward specific instances of important feelings and content in almost all areas of concern to the dyad. In level five the listener facilitates direct expression of all feelings and information that is personally relevant in concrete terms. The discussion is fluent, direct, and includes low-level abstraction.[44]

(6.) Confrontation

This dimension encourages the exploration of seemingly incongruent elements in a transaction. The incongruency can come in many different forms: verbal versus nonverbal communication, ideal self versus "real" self, behavior versus insight, listener's experience versus partner's experience, resources versus deficits, and many others. It may involve evaluation and external observations regarding the partner's behavior or perception. In their criticism of empathic listening, Arnett and Nakagawa refer to Buber, Gadamer, Heideggar and Tillich to support their contention that judgment and direct confrontation (as opposed to nonevaluation) are often necessary in interpersonal transactions.[45] Carkhuff agrees. Confrontation may involve pointing out areas where the partner's statements seem to be internally contradictory or where the partner's observations of events/experiences seem divergent from those of the listener. Instead of remaining silent to avoid "friction," the listener openly and with sensitivity notes areas of divergence in their perceptions, feelings, and beliefs.

Carkhuff's first level for this dimension is where the listener disregards perceived discrepancies in the partner's behavior or perceptions. The listener often passively accepts them and may even explicitly agree with them. (It seems some critics of empathic listening have erroneously stereotyped this as the usual level of function for empathic listeners.) Level two is similar to level one, although the listener doesn't explicitly accept the discovered discrepancies. On the third level the listener has some awareness of the discrepancies, but may only ask general or vague questions about them without specifically

indicating their divergence. At level four the verbal and nonverbal communication of the listener indicates awareness of discrepancies. The listener directly confronts the partner with the seeming incongruity. By level five the listener is consistently in tune with all discrepancies and confronts the partner with what Hart, Carlson, and Eadie would call "rhetorical sensitivity."[46] The listener is sensitive and aware of his/her partner during confrontation at this level.[47]

(7.) Immediacy

In this dimension the listener is dealing with the following question: "What is my partner really attempting to tell me that he/she cannot tell me directly?"[48] Immediacy involves the "here and now" of the interaction. It explores what is happening between listener and partner in the present. In a sense, process rather than content is the focus of immediacy because it examines the dyadic relationship being created at that very moment. We do not always come right out and explicitly say what we feel about our partner or the discussion at hand or the topic of that discussion. When a listener is engaged in high levels of immediacy, he/she tries to focus on these current factors.

At level one the listener's behaviors disregard both feeling and content which has possible ramifications for the relationship or which may be directed at the listener in particular. This valuable feedback is ignored in an oblivious manner. Level two is also high in disregarding most statements that have potential meaning for the immediate situation transpiring or the listener specifically, but to a lesser degree. In level three the listener tends to be open to exploring the immediate transaction, but doesn't get into specifics. The

listener provides feedback that he/she is open-minded and intellectually understands the partner's comments, however the listener does not focus the communication on specifics about his/her self or the immediate transaction. By level four the listener is willing to tentatively discuss the partner's allusions to the relationship at hand at this moment or the listener. When the listener is able to function at level five, there is direct and open discussion of the present relationship in the "here and now."[49]

Application of the Carkhuff Model to Listening Training/Education

We are all only too aware of the differences between knowledge and implementation of those ideas through appropriate skills. As Wilmot indicates, it has been a well recognized tenet of communication theory that both components are needed for communication competence.[50] The following material describes one possible methodology for blending the theoretical constructs of the Carkhuff model with the practice of actual listening skills. It is not offered as "the" solution to the technique/process dilemma, but as one possible approach.

The applied approach presented here is the summary of a methodology developed and used over a ten year period. It has been used with numerous participants from a variety of backgrounds including: students in the "professional"schools majoring in such areas as business, management, marketing, engineering, education, and so on; nurses and nursing students; secondary and elementary school teachers and personnel; college instructors; physical therapists; counseling and psychology majors; communication majors; pre-theology students; social workers; law enforcement personnel and their spouses; law enforcement students; art therapy majors; bankers; businessmen

and businesswomen; salespersons; and many others. Naturally, adjustments must be made depending upon the length of the program and whether it is offered for academic credit. What follows is the approach utilized at the University of Evansville in a four quarter-hour course designed to teach listening skills and develop an appreciation of the communication process.

This approach to listening education is designed to maintain the integrity of the transactional perspective of interpersonal communication. Thus, a blending of the theoretical and skill components is utilized to continually remind the participants of the framework within which the skills function.

Theoretical Component

(1.) Early sessions concentrate on an exploration of the entire transactional process. Communication variables are examined and the transactional model of communication is emphasized.

(2.) Early sessions also place a high priority on interpersonal rapport among participants. Various exercises are used to help participants feel comfortable and to build mutual trust. A trusting and caring atmosphere is encouraged. An underlying assumption here is that this atmosphere is necessary for maximum effectiveness in skill development.

(3.) The nature of dialogic communication is explored. The philosophic underpinnings and assumptions of dialogue are studied, stages of movement from monologue toward dialogue are examined, and the various components of dialogue are explored. Several possible texts can be used for this portion of the course.[51] This framework for practical skill development follows one of

the patterns suggested by Arnett and Nakagawa in their call for alternatives to pure skill-oriented empathic listening without throwing out the vital contributions offered by empathic listening. They state: "Such study could explore the effects and implications of a shift of attention from the internal self to a dialogical or hermeneutical transaction 'between' persons and the importance of contextual demands on our listening."[52]

Skill Component

(1.) Carkhuff's seven dimensions are examined one at a time until they are cognitively understood.

(2.) Each dimension is illustrated through specific exercises using volunteers and actual conversations. Usually, two participants volunteer to hold a discussion with one designated to work on a specific listening skill/dimension.

(3.) Each volunteer conversation is discussed or "processed" by :

(a.) general discussion of the transaction

(b.) individual observer "ratings" of the listener on the dimension(s) being practiced at the time

(c.) emphasizing the overall transaction in terms of dialogic communication

(4.) After each new dimension is demonstrated and processed by the entire group, small groups (which increase in number as the course progresses beginning with dyads) are used to continue the practice sessions. Sometimes the instructor will spend the entire small group time in one group and at other times will wander from group to group making observations.

(5.) The entire class gathers in a circular configuration to make additional

observations about the newly added dimension and the overall listening process.

Implementation Procedures

Some of the major procedures utilized to implement this blending of theory and skills are provided below:

(1.) Exercises progress very slowly from basic reflection of content ("You want to put off the meeting till Friday?"), to reflection of feelings ("You feel frustrated."), to blending of content and feelings ("You're frustrated because ..."), to locating the feeling source and feeling "target" ("You feel angry with yourself because you failed to tell him the truth." or "You're proud of him because . . ."). Personalizing content and feelings is practiced constantly during the sessions.

(2.) Emphasis is always on putting the pieces back together, although there is inevitably an early mechanical period in which self-consciousness is naturally present. Participants are encouraged to talk about this and it should be acknowledged as a normal phase in the learning of new skills.

(3.) The listeners are encouraged to discover "threads" in the content and feeling levels of their partner's communication so all the seemingly divergent statements of a free-flowing conversation start to show a pattern. This recognizes the tendency of most people to use a type of "stream of consciousness" technique in our conversations.

(4.) For variety, several handouts are distributed and discussed which examine various aspects of the communication and listening process. (For example, handouts are given on empathic listening, perception, defensive communication, types of listening, etc.)

(5.) Video tape can be used in several ways including:

(a.) use it for volunteer dyads to be played back during the "processing" sessions used to discuss each dimension initially

(b.) various tapes on communication can be used to present theoretical constructs and demonstrate practice of skills

(c.) examples of effective or ineffective communication/listening can be shown by presenting portions of television programs or scripted segments to demonstrate specific points

(6.) Variety can be provided by presenting other listening and communication theories, by holding a values auction, by discussing each person's communication philosophy, and by sharing actual experiences where the listening skills studied were implemented outside of class.

(7.) Each session is begun with a previously assigned "thought question." These discussion starters help get the group more involved and encourage their thinking about the concepts studied in new ways. ("Do other people make you feel?")

(8.) Other assignments can include verbatim papers and internalization papers in which practical application is emphasized.

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(9.) It is vitally important to consistently point out the overall transaction instead of falling into the trap of over emphasis on individual skills. The focus upon the entire transaction (interpersonal listening) and the blending of theory and skill practice seems to short circuit many of the potential dangers of skills training. Emphasis on caring and the dialogic process appears to keep the learners aware of the process nature of listening and communication.

Conclusion

Among other things, this paper is a justification of empathic listening. We must be careful to not "throw out the baby with the bath water." The problem is not with empathy, but with the isolated skills orientation to empathy. This paper has attempted to present empathy as a vital ingredient of effective interpersonal listening. Carkhuff's dimensions are built on the foundation of empathic understanding. The paper also serves to highlight the Carkhuff approach as a practical and theoretically sound perspective which can be combined with other communication and listening materials / theories to teach effective interpersonal listening.

FOOTNOTES

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[19]Ibid., p. 373.

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[22]John Stewart, "Interpretive Listening: An Alternative to Empathy," Communication Education, 32 (October, 1983), 379-391.

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[26]Robert R. Carkhuff, Ibid., p. 315-326.

[27]Ibid., p. 82.

[28]Ibid., pp. 82-83.

[29]Rotenstreich, p. 118.

[30]Carkhuff, II, p. 318.

[31]Arnett and Nakagawa, p. 373.

[32]See Carkhuff, II, pp. 315, 317, 319, 321, 323, 324, & 326; See also, C. B. Truax and Robert R. Carkhuff, Toward Effective Counseling and Psychotherapy (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967).

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[53] T. Dean Thomlison, pp. 249-250, 28.